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ABSTRACT

Noting that existing research reveals considerable diversity among researchers' philosophical stances toward literature-based reading instruction versus traditional basal reading instruction, a study determined what effects literature-based instruction had on the reading achievement of fourth graders. Subjects, fourth-grade students of the John P. Altgeld Elementary School in Chicago (Illinois) were randomly selected into a controlled group (taught for the first time by a teacher using the "Houghton-Mifflin Literature-Based Reading Series") and an experimental group (taught using the "Houghton-Mifflin Basal Series"). Comparison on reading sub-test scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills indicated no difference in students' reading achievement. Findings suggest that the method of reading instruction, while important, does not guarantee increased academic achievement. Further research is needed, considering that a major factor in classroom setting is the teacher and how the curriculum is implemented. (Contains 25 references and 1 table of data.) (RS)

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ED 379 612

THE EFFECT OF LITERATURE-BASED READING INSTRUCTION ON THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF FOURTH GRADERS

Lynette Pamphlet

Two of the major approaches in reading that have dominated reading instruction are *basal* reader approach and the language based approach. Recent discussion in the field of education has raised persistent questions about the role of literature based reading instruction and its effectiveness on reading achievement.

For decades *basal* readers have dominated instructional practices. Resistant to innovative ideas, *basal* systems have been a strong force in sustaining the status quo by offering teachers the materials that encourage them to do what traditional teachers have done in the past (Chall, 1989; Shannon, 1987). But there are concerns that the traditional *basal* method of instruction may not be the total package needed to instruct reading in the nineties. Although for decades *basal* readers have dominated instructional practices, the research base for literature based reading instruction is growing. Interest in literature is widespread, reading series are including more literature than ever before (Stewig, 1990).

Therefore, in this study, various research and their interpretations of the effect of *literature-based* reading instruction has been explored. The analysis and data of some existing research revealed that there was considerable diversity among the researchers philosophical stances toward *literature-based* reading instruction versus traditional *basal* reading instruction. More research is needed, however, to investigate further the potential of reading programs that engage the *literature-based* approach. This study may assist educators and administrators in making a valid decision to implement an effective reading program.

The current popularity of *literature-based* reading programs is evident to anyone who has attended national conventions or read journals in the field of reading education. Zarrillo (1988) believes that the movement towards *literature-based* reading has been prompted by three issues: 1) a call for an enhanced role for quality children's literature; 2) the advocacy for whole language approaches to literacy development which depend on children's' books for reading material; and 3) the professional decision making of teachers who do not want their reading programs dictated by *basal* materials (Shannon, 1987; Zarrillo, 1988).

Lamme (1987) stated that the most cherished memories of elementary school are often related to the times when teachers read stories to the class. Strickland (1987) maintains that literature and related activities help to establish connections between reading, writing, listening and speaking. These stories give the children a common set of experiences thus creating a positive community spirit. In comparison to the *basal* readers, children's literature provides more support for readers in a number of important ways.

Responding to the current movement toward *literature-based* reading instruction, McMahons' (1992) findings imply that teachers balance their purposes and goals because of the effects on how children respond to texts. Focus on aesthetic responses may not promote necessary skills and strategies. At the same time, focus on efferent responses seems to stifle interaction and the development of ideas. On the other hand, Goodman (1986) sites that characteristics of the *language-based* method of reading instruction as: a) no predetermined sequence of skills; b) no sight words taught in isolation; c) word meanings taught using each child's language; d) reduction in fear of failure; e) no ability level reading groups; and f) choice of reading material by each child. In addition, Gentry (1987) maintains that the *language-based* method emphasizes the communication of meaning which is the natural purpose of language. These techniques are advocated to not only effectively teach reading but to also make life-long readers.

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Three major approaches to reading instruction have dominated reading curriculums over the past forty years: *basal* reader approach, the language experience approach, and skills approaches emphasizing phonics or graphophonemics. Research questions have addressed teaching methods and the context of literacy learning. Methodology has been qualitative, as well as quantitative or experimental (Pickering, 1989). Many quantitative studies that compared a whole language (*literature-based*) and traditional (*basal*) approach, have been published between 1988 and 1993 and selected for analysis. Findings suggest that: whole language approach has a small positive effect on reading comprehension, and the use of quality literature is important. The majority of studies concluded that the *literature-based* method produced higher reading achievement and fostered more positive attitudes toward reading than the *basal* reading method. Children of all ability levels, given opportunity to experience reading as a visual and thought process, take a more active role in their own learning. Students not only learn to read, they also develop a love for reading and become life long readers through the process of using a *literature-based* method. Research evidence also supports the use of a shared book experience. Most teachers are required to use a *basal* reading series. In *literature-based* programs, the secret of success is creating the right learning environment.

Huggins (1990) reiterates that there is considerable research evidence to suggest that literature has a positive effect on reading achievement. The use of a *literature-based* program is an effective alternative to the traditional *basal* reading approach (Huggins, 1990).

In a recent study by Fisher and Hiebert (1990) on *literature-based*, whole language and at-risk students, during extensive observations of 40 days of instruction in classrooms implementing literature programs in grades 2 and 6, the researchers observed many aspects of instruction. They found that students spent significantly more time on literacy and writing tasks than students in traditional *basal* programs.

The introduction of a *literature-based* reading program in a special education classroom helped students learn to read better and promoted their desire to read (D'Alessandro, 1990). A study examining the effectiveness of a pilot *literature-based* reading program indicated that teachers and the majority of the sixth grade students interviewed expressed a preference for *literature-based* reading over *basal* reading instruction. Findings suggest that ability-grouping should be eliminated in alignment with *literature-based* approaches described in professional literature which help students develop strategies used by proficient readers (Robbins, 1990).

In many schools, teachers have put aside short stories found in the *basal* series to read children's books, from cover to cover, in reading class. Literature has become a popular enrichment activity. When students were asked if they preferred reading novels or *basal* stories, the results of a survey done by Clifford Kramer a reading specialist at Park Elementary School in Cross Plains, Wisconsin, was that the 110 children overwhelmingly preferred the novels. Novels can provide the opportunity for better group discussions, learning more vocabulary words and giving the students more time to read silently. All three of these teaching strategies can help students to become better readers.

In opposition of the *literature-based* movement, Zarrillo (1990) asserts that there is a gap between theory and practice in *literature-based* reading programs. He states that too, such programs lack an underlying theory and mimic methodology associated with *basal* programs. There is a growing belief among some educators that within the next decade whole language programs will replace *basal* readers. They argue that *basal* readers and whole language programs (such as *literature-based*) are incompatible and cannot coexist. Basals may have become what

they were designed to be, not total programs but useful tools for helping teachers carry out effective reading instruction as stated by Farr (1988).

Goodman (1988) stated that the *basal* reader method of reading instruction which has dominated reading instruction in the United States is often viewed as a complete system which involves deliberate teaching methods. The *basal* method is preferred by many teachers because of it's straight-forwardness and the simplicity of it's testing of students recall (Holland and Hall, 1989). A study done at the University of Texas at Austin (1994) was part of a longitudinal investigation to examine changes in literacy programs and instruction through use of new *basal* reading materials. There the findings were that the 1993 *basal* series received higher ratings than those published in 1986. The literacy analysis was based on realistic stories, fantasy, rhyme and poetry. The study was a starting point for identifying engaging qualities of texts to understand what might hold students' interest and attention.

In a study in which the effects of instructional methods on reading comprehension was researched, the results indicated that the dependent variable was not significantly related to method of reading instruction (*literature-based* or *basal*), nor was there an interaction effect between the two methods and IQ in predicting the CAT comprehension scale score (Rubel, 1990). Similarly, the effects of *literature-based* reading instruction (whole language approach) and the *basal* reading instruction on reading achievement of first graders, was studied by Hall and Holland (1989). Results showed no significant difference in the total reading achievement of first-graders taught by language-based method versus *basal* method.

Thomson and Miller (1991) studied the effectiveness of a direct instructional (*basal*) model as a supplement to a *literature-based* delivery model on the reading achievement of 80 first graders. Results indicated that the direct instruction (*basal*) group did significantly poorer in the school readiness inventory; yet scored as well on the word recognition and fluency post-tests as the other group; and scored higher on the student survey.

Reutzels (1987) research indicates that instructional units in the *basal* readers studied were composed of several mini-lessons rather than representing an integrated and related unit organized around a central purpose. He finds that lesson parts failed to make logical connections to previous or following parts. Thus, concluding that the nature of reading lessons could be a contributing factor to the individual "flitting" observed in previous classroom observational studies.

The conflict between *literature-based*—or whole language approaches to reading instruction—and the direct instruction approach—*basal*—as used with students at risk or having learning disabilities, concluded that each approach is often depicted in an idealized fashion, but that, in practice, the approaches overlap and can be integrated. When considering whether the integration of *literature-based* with the *basal* reader would increase the use of language and comprehension of literature, research of Erpelding (1990) finds that students benefited from the combined use of *literature-based* and the *basal* reader.

Researchers and educators disagree on whether *literature-based* reading instruction or *basal* reading instruction is preferred for the teaching of reading. Since poor reading skills and comprehension continues to be a concern, additional research is needed to assess the effectiveness of the instructional method. There are more research questions to be answered relative to the effectiveness of *language-based* instructions in increasing literacy comprehension

of students. The major factor determining future applications of *language-based* literature will likely be teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and their willingness and ability to use *language-based* reading instruction in their teaching. For major change to occur efficiently, teachers need to appreciate that change is one routine may strongly impact others (Thomas and Miller, 1991).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what effects *literature-based* instruction has on the reading achievement of fourth graders.

The samples for the study included fourth grade students of John P. Altgeld Elementary School. Each spring students take the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills* (ITBS). From these fourth grade students, one group was randomly selected, the other group was available. Subjects in the controlled group were taught reading using the *Houghton-Mifflin Literature-Based Reading Series* , while the experimental group was taught by the *Houghton-Mifflin Basal.* Results from the 1993 ITBS reading sub-test were used as a scale of measurement. A t-test (p>.o5) for independent samples was done on two sets of scores to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the reading programs. The table summarizes the statistical analysis.

Table I

Posttest Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Test for Experimental and Control Group for Reading Achievement cores.

	Reading Group		
	Literature-based	***Basal***	***t***
M	3.55	3.56	2.045
SD	1.322	.9972	

Note: Maximum Score = 7.1
df 29, p. > .05 n=30
* Significant at .05 level

Examination of the 1993 mean scores indicate that the experimental group and control group were not significantly different, the experimental group with a mean of 3.56 and the control with a mean of 3.55. The finding and other information about the experimental group and control group which is presented (see Table I) permits the conclusion that the two groups were equivalent in reading achievement in the spring of 1993.

Overall, the data leads to the acceptance of null hypothesis: "fourth grade students taught reading using *literature-based* reading instruction will not differ on reading achievement scores than those taught with the traditional *basal* instruction."

The results of this study are consistent with those of Holland and Hall (1989) who found that there was no significant difference between reading achievement scores of students taught using *basal* instruction and those taught using a *literature-based* instructional method. The method of reading instruction, while important, does not guarantee increased academic achievement.

Research such as that of Rubel (1990) and Thompson and Miller (1991) are also consistent with the results of this study. However, research does not support the idea that the preferred method for teaching reading is exclusively the *literature-based* method or the traditional *basal* method. Rather, the teaching of reading should be a coexistence of both instructional methods.

Furthermore, the results of this study confirm that follow-up research is needed as more students participate in *literature-based* reading programs. As previously noted in the review of

literature, most studies show positive effects for the *literature-based* programs, but the difference is currently a significantly small one. The results of this study were gratifying in that they were not negative results, but show that the potential for the success of an actively instructed *literature-based* program with equally active participants can have a positive impact on literacy for children.

Since this study took place in a heterogeneous environment, the results may not be generalized to all classrooms. It should also be noted that Houghton-Mifflin *Literature-based* Program was taught for the first time by the control group teacher, therefore suggesting that focus be placed on teacher's personal growth in this area, may be one extraneous variable effecting the significance of this study's results. This corroborates the idea that a major factor in classroom setting is the teacher and how the curriculum is implemented.

Researchers and educators disagree on whether the *literature-based* or *basal* method is preferable for the teaching of reading. Since poor reading skills and comprehension continues to be a concern, additional research is needed to assess the effectiveness of instructional method..

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